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The Timorese leader, baffled by Portugal's "unbending position", disagrees with Foreign Office actions.

Abilio Araujo has little faith in the success of the "cross meetings" held earlier this month under the auspices of the UN Secretary General. He would like to see "trade channels" opened with East Timor, as a way of "maintaining Portugal's cultural influence" in the territory.

Describing the "cross meetings" as being "still-born" (i.e. non-starters), Abilio Araujo said he could not foresee "any chance of talks between Durao Barroso and Lopes da Cruz, because of Portugal's unbending position". His criticism is based on the fact that the Portuguese Foreign Minister "underrated" his meeting on 4 October with President Suharto's itinerant ambassador by pointing out that it had only been important in so far that it had made possible the Alatas-Horta meeting, held two days later.

"The Portuguese Government should not express views on the importance of Timorese representatives. To do so is to attempt to determine the result of self-determination", said Abilio Araujo. This is the first time a Timorese leader has ever criticised Portuguese diplomacy on the Timor issue in such a vehement manner.

Ramos Horta's accusations

Abilio Araujo, who, with Francisco Lopes da Cruz, promoted the "reconciliation meetings", also complained that Portugal did not agree to the first "reconciliation meeting" (which took place on the outskirts of London on 15 and 16 December 1993) being held in Lisbon, as he himself had suggested to Cavaco Silva's government. He went on to argue that the Indonesian authorities would then have agreed to Dili being the venue for the second "reconciliation meeting" (held in Wales in September), "which would have constituted a significant concession by Jakarta, and a conquest for the Timorese cause". Furthermore, according to Araujo, such a move by Portugal would have underlined, in the eyes of the international community, Portugal's status as administering power of East Timor.

In the view of this Timorese leader, who continues to refer to himself as the Chairman of Fretilin, elected by the 1984 Congress (he was, in fact, expelled by the party's Central Council in August last year), it was the Resistance faction that he leads which eventually managed to make some headway with the

Indonesian authorities. He recalled it was only after the London "reconciliation meeting" that the seven students, persecuted by the Indonesian army, were allowed to leave for Portugal, and that a group of Timorese living in Portugal were allowed to visit East Timor in April last year. What the Indonesians got in exchange was last May's pilgrimage to Fatima by 50 integrationists led by Suharto's ambassador.

He denies the accusations, leveled at him by the Resistance generally, that he has "yielded" to the Indonesians. In the last edition of Expresso, Ramos Horta accused him of getting "finance" from Indonesia for the "reconciliation meetings".

"I pay my own travel expenses", Araujo stated. Referring to the reports about him being driven around in a car belonging to the Indonesian diplomatic corps when he met with Alatas in New York, he said that, because of the 3-hour delay in the flight from Rome, "it was necessary to arrive at the hotel in time, so that the Minister would receive Ramos Horta". With regard to the meeting with the Indonesian Foreign Minister, he said there had been "no giving way", and even points out that he was received as a representative of a section of the Timorese community opposed to integration.

The desire to be "a credible leader"

He went on to say that during the meeting he reiterated what the last "reconciliation meeting" demanded of the Indonesian administration: demilitarisation of the territory, release of political prisoners, an end to the wave of transmigration of Indonesians to East Timor, "Timorisation" of the administration, and the introduction in schools of Tetum and Portuguese History, "even as an optional subject". Abilio Araujo stressed that "there will be no further reconciliation meetings as long as there is no sign that Indonesia agrees to these demands".

If the UN is promoting "cross meetings", what is the point of "reconciliation meetings"? Araujo argues that "the aim is to prevent - should the people opt for independence - the possibility that what is happening in Angola happens in Timor". He said that one way to narrow the gap between fellow citizens was to make it possible for them to be culturally different, even in their eating habits. To achieve this, Araujo is prepared to establish "trade channels with Timorese citizens", so that food-stuffs such as salted cod, wine, etc. can be sent into East Timor. However, he refutes Ramos Horta's allegations, which appeared in Expresso, that he has set up in business with Lopes da Cruz.

While the "reconciliation meetings" are dependent on "signs of good will" coming from Indonesia, Abilio Araujo says that he now awaits the green light for a meeting with Suharto. He has already met "several times" with the President's daughter, and believes that "the change of regime will come from that family, and now it is time to show that.. " he is a "credible leader".